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ABSTRACT

While the appropriate duties of elementary and secondary school counselors have been well defined by various professional organizations, these duties remain unclear in the middle school level. This study was conducted to examine the perceptions of teachers, administrators, parents, and students in grades six through eight concerning the appropriate roles of the middle school counselor. The Role of Counselors Survey (ROCS) was completed by 263 students, 111 parents, 43 teachers, and 8 administrators (total N=425) from eight middle schools in rural Northeastern Kentucky (an eight county, rural area located in the Appalachian Mountain region). The findings revealed that teachers and administrators perceived the role of the middle school counselor more favorably than did the students and parents. In spite of their favorable perception of the counselor, teachers often saw counselors as an alternative to administrative personnel because of the administrative duties that are often thrust upon them. The less favorable perception of the counselor held by students and parents could be linked to the fact that counselors are very often seen performing administrative duties, causing conflict between the perceived role of the counselor and his/her true role. This supports the view that there is a need for role definition of counselors. The survey instrument is attached. (NB)

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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ABSTRACT

The role of Counselors Survey (ROCS) was sent to 12 schools, which house grades 6-8, in rural Northeastern Kentucky. Eight of these schools participated. A total of 425 surveys were returned, which represented students, parents, teachers, and administrators. That is, it was found that teachers and administrators viewed the role of the middle school counselor more favorably than did the students and parents. The findings of this study support previous research and provide further information concerning the perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor.

Introduction

The role of the counselor within the school system has long been an area of confusion. This role confusion has ranged from that of clerical work to that of social work. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators seem to view counselors with different perceptions because of conflicting views within the educational system itself. Remley and Albright (1988) researched the differences in the perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor as seen by students, parents, teachers, and administrators and found that differences do exist among the groups.

The appropriate duties of elementary and secondary school counselors have been well defined by various professional organizations, but these still remain unclear at the middle school level, even for the counselors, themselves. It must be taken into account that the middle school concept is relatively new and that the role of the middle school counselor remains unclear due to a lack of role definition and, in the past, a lack of education specified for middle school counseling. However, universities have updated their curriculum to meet the needs of middle school counselors due to the emergence of middle schools across the United States. But even education has not completely solved the role confusion in counseling at the middle school level. Much confusion still remains in the eyes of students, parents, teachers and administrators.

If it could be determined what functions or roles counselors are assuming as compared to those which are the appropriate counselor roles, (e.g. American School Counselors Association [ASCA]) then this comparison could be used to help abolish the roles which hinder the counselor. Perhaps this information could also reduce role confusion for counselors as well as for students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

METHOD

Subjects

The population for this study consisted of students, parents, teachers, and administrators in 12 randomly selected Northeastern Kentucky schools that contain all or part of the middle school grades (grades 6-8). Northeastern Kentucky is geographically an eight county, rural area located in the Appalachian Mountain region, which is often perceived to be low in socioeconomic status (SES).

Of the 12 schools contacted, eight schools participated in the survey. From these participating schools, 425 surveys were returned, which indicated a 41.2% response rate. Of the surveys returned, 263 out of 480 surveys were returned from students, 43 out of 60 surveys were returned from teachers, 111 out of 480 surveys were returned from parents, and eight out of 12 surveys were returned from administrators. The students ranged from 11 to 15 years in age with 10 sixth grade students, 155 seventh grade students, and 97 eighth grade students participating. Teachers and administrators ranged from 1 to 35 years of experience within the educational system. Overall, 148 males and 275 females participated, with 356 being Caucasian, 6 being Afro-American, 1 being Hispanic, and 5 indicated "other". It must be noted that two subjects did not indicate gender, while 57 did not indicate race.

Materials

The instrument used in this survey is the Role of Counselors Survey (ROCS) developed by the present author. The ROCS is a survey consisting of a personal information section and 20 statements (e.g. Counselors help students with school problems.) to be ranked on a Likert scale (1=never, 5=always). The maximum score possible on the ROCS is 100 with a minimum score of 20 possible. Thirteen statements on the survey were positively stated. Statement numbers 4, 9, 11, 12, 15, 18, and 19 were stated negatively. Content validity is high on the ROCS due to the statements on the ROCS and the counseling roles being directly related. The personal information section, to be completed anonymously, includes demographic data such as sex, race, age, grade (if student), and number of years of experience in education (if teacher or administrator). (See Appendix A). This survey allows four groups to rate their counselors on counselor roles and functions.

Procedure

In this study, 1,080 surveys were mailed to 12 participating schools in Northeastern Kentucky. Ninety surveys were sent to each of the following schools: East Carter Jr. High School, West Carter Jr. High School, McKell Middle School, Wurtland Middle School, Russell Middle School, Verity Middle School, Catlettsburg Jr. High School, Summitt Jr. High School, Louisa Middle

School, Rowan County Middle School, Lewis County Jr. High School, and Fairview Independent. The surveys, accompanied by an introductory letter, were distributed in the following manner: 40 surveys were given to students in grades 6, 7 and 8, 40 surveys were given to their parents, five surveys were given to middle school teachers (grades 6-8), one survey was given to an administrator, and four extra surveys were available, if needed. Counselors were not included in the survey because only the perceptions of the students, parents, teachers, and administrators were addressed. The completed surveys were to be returned by May 18, 1992 in an envelope that was provided.

DATA ANALYSIS

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences in the perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor as seen by students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The independent variable was the groups (students, teachers, parents, administrators) and the dependent variable was the perceptions of the role of middle school counselors.

RESULTS

The total score on the ROCS ranged from a score of 36 to a score of 93, with a median score of 76 and a mean score of 75 with a standard deviation of 10. The mode score was 72.

The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that there were significant differences in perceptions of middle school counselors between students, parents, teachers, and administrators, $F(3,421)=7.58$, $p<.05$ (See Table 1).

That is, the mean scores of the teachers and administrators ($M=80.79$ and $M=80.00$, $SD=6.57$ and $SD=14.69$, respectively) were significantly higher than the mean scores of the students and parents ($M=74.36$ and $M=73.33$, $SD=9.34$ and $SD=10.32$, respectively). (See Table 2). Therefore, teachers and administrators perceived counselors more favorably than did students and parents.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it was found that teachers and administrators perceived the role of the middle school counselor more favorably than did the students and parents. Counselors must improve their reputation among the students and parents and good public relations could be the key. That is, students and parents must be made aware of the role of the counselor within the school, and what that implies. Counselors could also pursue activities that would involve both parents and students that would introduce them to the various roles of the counselor. However, if counselors are to be successful, they must communicate effectively with students.

Even though teachers and administrators reported a more favorable perception of the counselor than did the students and parents, there is room for improvement in the eyes of the counselor's peers. For example, Remley and Albright (1988) found that "teachers believed that middle school counselors spent too much time performing administrative duties instead of assisting teachers and counseling students" (p. 293). The findings of this study support their finding. That is, teachers often see counselors as an alternative to administrative personnel because of the administrative duties that are often thrust upon them. If a counseling program is to be effective, administrators and teachers must assume their own responsibilities so that the counselor can do likewise.

The less favorable perception of counselor as seen by students and parents could be linked to the fact that counselors are very often seen performing administrative duties, causing conflict between the perceived role of the counselor and their true role. Remley and Albright (1988) reported that administrators had no concensus of opinion on the role of the counselor. This supports the fact that there is a need for role definition of counselors at all levels of education, because the problem is not unique to the middle school, but is also found in the elementary and secondary school settings. When a role definition is presented that frees counselors of all their extra duties, then an improvement in perceptions of counselors across the board will be seen.

There have also been concerns voiced about the qualifications of counselors. Remley and Albright (1988) found that some parents believed that counselors should not engage in counseling middle school children regarding personal problems. The less favorable perception of counselors by parents reported in the present study also seem to support this fact. Counselors must prove that they are indeed competent mental health professionals. Counselors need to put top priority on individual and group counseling by setting aside administrative tasks. Counselors must take the initiative if they are to clarify their role by referring to professional organizations that are oriented strictly to guidance

and counseling. These professional organizations are a vast storehouse of information when dealing with the role of the counselor.

Although there were some methodological weaknesses in the Remley and Albright study, the present results support their findings that differences exist in the perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor as seen by students, parents, teachers, and administrators. These studies should give counselors the incentive to try to eliminate these differences.

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Table 1

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Total Perceptions of Middle School Counselors by Groups

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F
Main Effect				
Group	2048.873	3	682.958	7.58*
Residual	37906.186	421	90.038	
Total	39955.059	424	94.234	

NOTE: *$p < .05$

Table 2

Mean Perceptions of Middle School Counselors by Group

Group	N	M	SD
Students	263	74.36	9.34
Parents	111	73.33	10.32
Teachers	43	80.79	6.57
Administrators	8	80.00	14.69

APPENDIX A

Dear Participant:

The role of counselors within the school system has long been an area of confusion. This role confusion has ranged from that of clerical work to that of social work. The public seems to view counselors with different perceptions due to the fact of an unclear role in the educational system. With this in mind, I see a need to explore the public's perceptions of counselors and the duties that they perform.

The following is a questionnaire designed to gather information based upon your perceptions of school counselors and their duties. You are asked to anonymously complete this questionnaire as honestly as you can. Part I of this survey deals with personal information but still keeps the survey anonymous and Part II is the actual survey. Please follow directions. Thank you for your time and involvement in this survey.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey L. Huffman, MA Ed.
East Carter Jr. High School

********** PART I **********

DIRECTIONS: Please complete the following questions as they pertain to you.

I AM A/AN: Administrator____ Teacher____ Student____ Parent__

AGE: _____

GRADE: (if student) _____

SEX: Male____ Female_____

NUMBER OF YEARS EXPERIENCE: (if administrator/teacher) _____

ETHNIC BACKGROUND: Caucasian____ Afro-American____ Asian____
Hispanic____ Other____.

********** PART II **********

DIRECTIONS: Circle the number that best describes your perceptions of school counselors and their duties, using the following scale: (1=never, 2=hardly ever, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always).

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors help students with school problems.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors are involved in testing and assessment of students.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors keep secrets unless you or someone else is in danger.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors discipline students.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors help students with emotional problems

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors help to educate students about drugs and drug abuse.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors meet with teachers and parents, if needed.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors help students with career choices.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors perform administrative duties, such as bus duty.

**********PART II CONTINUED**********

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors help students with family problems.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors only talk to students when their grades are bad.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors waste time.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors help students in scheduling classes.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors keep in contact with the community through a newsletter or an update in the local newspaper.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors have too much paper work.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors refer some students to local agencies for help.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors are important to the functioning of the school.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors only help those students who make good grades.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors and social workers have basically the same job description.

1 2 3 4 5 Counselors are always honest with their clients.

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